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### The tourist and the toured: How hostel owners navigate the age of global gentrification

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# **The tourist and the toured: how hostel owners navigate the age of global gentrification**

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**Abstract:** Since the mid-1990s, numerous Moroccan riads, or traditional homes built around a central courtyard, have been converted into tourist accommodations in Morocco's old medinas. This paper seeks to analyze the impact of riad-style hostels specifically on the medinas, as hostels are relatively new to Morocco and have various benefits and consequences for the community. Though hostels are often portrayed as a sustainable form of tourist accommodation compared to multinational hotel corporations, they have an acute impact by bringing tourists into previously residential spaces and exacerbating the effects of global gentrification. My research relies on interviews with hostel owners and employees, as well as supplementary interviews with guests or members of the community in four cities: Fes, Tangier, Rabat, and Essaouira. This paper discusses the dynamics of representation encountered by hosts and the interactions between hostels and the community. I also transition into a discussion I had not anticipated regarding the varying approaches of hostels toward receiving Moroccan guests. My research question is: how do hostel owners in Morocco navigate cultural representation and tourist intrusion in the medinas in the age of global gentrification?

*Key Words:* gentrification, representation, cultural studies, hostels, tourism, riad

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*Note: With the exception of Professor Sadik Rddad, all names have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals interviewed for the purposes of this research.*

## Introduction

The idea for my research topic was sparked by a New Yorker article by Rebecca Mead that I read last April, originally titled “Airbnb Moves In.”<sup>1</sup> The article describes the “touristification” of Barcelona, citing the introduction of a fee to access the previously public Park Güell as an early example of its impact. Marketing, policy decisions, and budget airlines are only partially responsible. According to Mead, Airbnb has had a particularly acute impact by leading to tourist overcrowding in previously residential neighborhoods. Although five times as many visitors to Barcelona stay in hotels, the approximately 20,000 Airbnb listings serve 1.5 million visitors annually, and the conversion of homes into short-term rentals elevates housing prices and exacerbates the trend of global gentrification. In the past dozen years, Mead writes, the resident population in the Gothic Quarter has declined by 45 percent. And global gentrification not only impacts those forced to move out; it also changes the cultural make-up of the city for the people who stay.

My research is not on Airbnb’s presence in northern Morocco, but rather on converted-riad hostels and the impact of their presence on the medinas. Hostels attract a specific type of population, often young, conscious travelers on a budget, who, according to my literature review, tend to seek greater cultural immersion than mass tourists. However, the guests in these hostels are still seeking lodging in a location where there is not necessarily a presence of hotels. Thus, their presence has the potential to be disruptive to residential communities. As we have discussed in our seminar, the families in Morocco’s medinas traditionally know their neighbors and live with the extended family. Only in recent decades have nuclear families begun moving out of the medina, and *riads* have been divided into smaller apartments. This trend, accompanied by global

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<sup>1</sup> Mead, R. (2019, April 22). The Airbnb Invasion of Barcelona. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/04/29/the-airbnb-invasion-of-barcelona>.

gentrification and the conversion of riads into tourist accommodations, is transforming some medinas, with Marrakech being a prime example. Furthermore, the presence of tourists in communities that were previously residential spaces impacts the cultural presentation of that space. The economic pressure to engage in self-commodification in the context of cultural tourism in a post-colonial society may impact the experiences of hostel owners in their interactions with guests, as may potential resentment from surrounding residents toward the presence of foreign tourists in their communities.

Though I am a student studying abroad in Morocco, I am nevertheless still a tourist, and there are many spaces in Morocco in which my presence is undoubtedly disruptive. I love to travel, and I love to do so in an immersive manner, such as via a homestay. I frequently reflect on why I want to travel, and what the impact of my presence is. I believe I could learn a lot about the ethics of travel and of intercultural learning by hearing the perspectives of hostel owners in gentrifying but somewhat preserved spaces. This research also has implications for tourism policy, as the coastal resort and luxury hotel strategy Morocco favors in its Vision 2020 goals may not financially benefit local residents in the same way that hostels can. My research aims to add context to the larger dilemma of the balance of local investment versus tourist intrusion, and how tourists are perceived and received by those not invested in the mass tourism industry from a position of power, for example, as corporate investors or government affiliates.

My research question is: how do hostel owners in northwestern Morocco navigate cultural representation and tourist intrusion in the medinas in the age of global gentrification? I expect hostel owners and employees are in this industry for a reason and probably enjoy engaging with guests, although financial pressure in a country with a large tourism industry also likely plays a role in making hostel work their choice of occupation. However, I expect that if the

residents in the surrounding medinas do not always appreciate the tourist presence in their neighborhood, hostel owners may face some difficulty navigating how to bring people into their community while minimizing disruption and resisting self-commodification.

## **Defining Terms**

### *Defining global gentrification*

Gentrification is the process by which urbanization and residential upgrading drives up housing prices and the cost of living, forcing the former, lower-income residents out. A number of factors are involved in facilitating this phenomenon, but gentrification typically refers to the migration of the middle-class into inner cities.<sup>2</sup> Gentrification is a global phenomenon, as cities worldwide undergo demographic change that results in displacement. However, when I use the term global gentrification, I am referring specifically to the displacement and rising property values that arises from the expansion of global tourism and tourist presence in spaces where hotels are not necessarily present, a trend described in Rebecca Mead's article: "The Airbnb Invasion of Barcelona." I will discuss this term further in my literature review.

### *Defining hostel, guesthouse, and riad*

The accommodations in which I am conducting my research vary between the categories of hostel, guesthouse, and riad. I am defining a hostel as an establishment that offers inexpensive lodging in the form of dormitory-style living with strangers, though it may offer private rooms as well. A guesthouse also falls into the category of budget accommodation and may have dormitory-style rooms; however, they are not shared with strangers, only members of the same party. In a guesthouse, solo travelers would rent an entire room. The primary difference,

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<sup>2</sup> De Oliver, M. (2019). Defending Gentrification as a Valid Collective Conception: Utilizing the Metanarrative of "Suburbia" as a Common Axis for the Diversity of Middle-Class Reurbanization Projects. *Urban Affairs Review*, 55(5), pp. 1487-1511. Retrieved from [journals.sagepub.com/home/uar](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/uar).

therefore, between a hostel and a guesthouse is the option to share a room with other travellers. A riad is a traditional Moroccan house built to accommodate an entire extended family. It is structured around a central garden or courtyard. As tourism expands in Morocco and social trends favor moving away from the extended family into nuclear family units, many riads in Morocco's medinas have been divided into smaller apartment units or converted into tourist accommodations, including hostels and guesthouses.<sup>3</sup>

## Literature Review

### *Cultural consumption and representation*

Tourism in Morocco has accelerated rapidly in Morocco in the last couple of decades, in part due to the government's focus on expanding this industry to promote development.<sup>4</sup> The Tourist Master Plan was launched in 2001, and, by 2006, the number of tourists visiting Morocco doubled to 4.1 million annually.<sup>5</sup> According to Borghi and Minca, the government's new vision for tourism involves creating "a new 'culture of hospitality' able to accommodate mass arrivals from Europe, new, more sophisticated, expressions of colonial aesthetics, and new forms of secure (geopolitically speaking) and easy-to-reach Oriental exoticism."<sup>6</sup> The packaging of this Oriental spectacle, however, is far from new; by the end of the 1800s, painters, writers, artists, explorers and missionaries had propagated a conception of Morocco as the "Oriental ideal," a conception that shifted the "Orientalist gaze" from Cairo and Shanghai toward Morocco.<sup>7</sup> From the outset of French colonial rule, Morocco's tourism industry became institutionalized with an international tourism campaign by the French governor, despite the initial relative instability of

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<sup>3</sup> Williams, S. (2017, April 10). A Brief History of Riads, Morocco's Exquisite Accommodation. *The Culture Trip*, Retrieved from [theculturetrip.com/africa/morocco/articles/a-brief-history-of-riads-moroccos-exquisite-accommodation/](http://theculturetrip.com/africa/morocco/articles/a-brief-history-of-riads-moroccos-exquisite-accommodation/).

<sup>4</sup> Borghi, R. and Minca, C. (2009). Morocco: Restaging Colonialism for the masses. In *Cultures of Mass Tourism. Doing the Mediterranean in the Age of Banal Mobilities* (M. Crang et al., ed.). Londre: Ashgate.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. pp. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. pp. 4.

the Protectorate.<sup>8</sup> When Morocco gained independence in 1956, it inherited the tourist institutions established by the French, as well as the tourist cultures of the colonial era, and the Moroccan government's policies and investment strategies following independence fell in line.<sup>9</sup> According to Borghi and Minca, the legacies of colonialism prevailing in Morocco's tourist culture and the government's promotion of Morocco as an exotic but accessible Oriental society contribute to a phenomenon that they describe as the "tourist colonization of the medina."<sup>10</sup> Marrakech is the prime example of this phenomenon's realization, as it is seen as a destination in which all aspects of Moroccan identity, as well as all of the Orientalist tropes, are on display. In the words of Borghi and Minca; "here, Moroccan 'culture' can be staged for the masses."<sup>11</sup>

Borghi and Minca go on to explain two dynamics at play in tourist consumption of culture in the Marrakech medina: the repetition and banality of cultural representation, and the accelerated conversion of riads into hotels or B&Bs to cater to European tourists who want to experience the authenticity and traditions of the old city.<sup>12</sup> Thus, not only is the culture of the medina re-designed and packaged for mass tourist consumption, but the tourists themselves alter the socio-cultural make-up of spaces that were not previously open to the Western gaze. The repetition and banality of cultural representation and the colonial legacies that Borghi and Minca speak of are reiterated in an article by Alexis Bunten on indigenous tourism in New Zealand and Alaska. In both of these settings, Bunten argues, "tour guides meet the tourist gaze with its oftentimes nostalgic, romanticizing, patronizing and colonialist overtones."<sup>13</sup> Indigenous tour

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. pp. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. pp. 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. pp. 19.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. pp. 17.

<sup>13</sup> Bunten, A. (2010, April). Indigenous tourism: the paradox of gaze and resistance. *La Ricerca Folklorica, No. 61, Indigenous tourism, performance, and cross-cultural understanding in the pacific*. pp. 51-59. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41548467>. Pp. 53.

guides face what Bunten refers to as the “paradox of representation;” in making their culture a commodity, their product must be competitive, but simultaneously confront the preconceived stereotypes of tourists.<sup>14</sup> However, cultural or indigenous tourism is prone to routinization and simplification, and tour guides are pressed to deliver a ‘model culture’ that reflects a pre-colonial past and neglects the adverse impacts of colonialism.<sup>15</sup> Though Bunten notes that indigenous-owned tourism businesses today are moving away from this model, they still ascribe to a cultural tourism formula based on the norms of hospitality present in the culture of the guest.<sup>16</sup> Yet Bunten argues that *self-commodification*, in which an individual markets a facet of their identity, is not synonymous with selling out, but rather is a practice that involves agency and conscious, albeit covert, resistance to stereotypes.<sup>17</sup> Tourism does play a role in perpetuating and maintaining a cultural identity, and most of the businesses Bunten interviewed for her study aim to prioritize cultural integrity over profit.<sup>18</sup> However, this effort is dynamic and continuously present in host-guest interactions throughout the cultural tourism industry. Though a large portion of converted riads in Morocco are foreign-owned, my research indicates that the majority of hostels, and likely guesthouses as well, employ Moroccan staff. Located in Morocco’s medinas in prime locations for cultural tourism, these establishments are likely spaces in which people regularly face Bunten’s “paradox of representation.”

#### *Tourist gentrification of Morocco’s medinas*

As previously discussed, cultural tourism has been evolving in Morocco for well over a century. Hostels and guesthouses, however, are relatively new to Morocco’s medinas, and they

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. pp. 51.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. pp. 54.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. pp. 51.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. pp. 52.

constitute a new face to the politics of representation and tourist gentrification in the country. Marrakech is the most extreme manifestation of tourist gentrification, one that Maciej Kalaska asserts is not replicated in other Moroccan cities.<sup>19</sup> The “colonization” of the Medina of Marrakech by the tourism industry began at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with an increase in tourist infrastructure and the conversion of homes into guesthouses, or *maisons d’hôtes*.<sup>20</sup> The traditional riads in Morocco’s medinas have also been converted into hostels. The pioneers of this trend were a “creative class” of mostly foreigners, who bought and restored riads in Marrakech in the early 1990s, transforming them into tourist accommodations or, less frequently, second homes.<sup>21</sup> A real estate boom accelerated this process after 1999, causing housing prices to rise, economic segregation to increase due to areas of concentrated foreign ownership of property, and the social fabric to alter as foreigners appropriated the urban space and tended to exhibit behaviors considered disrespectful toward the host culture.<sup>22</sup> The rapidity of this process in the Marrakech Medina is striking. In 1997, there were a mere handful of guesthouses, and in 2000, there were still under 50.<sup>23</sup> By 2008, however, Kalaska estimates that there were approximately 450 guesthouses in the Medina, 70 percent of which were owned by foreigners of European origin.<sup>24</sup>

The term “gentrification” very much acts as an umbrella term. Even within the specific category of tourist gentrification, a number of motivations are at play in driving this phenomenon. To contextualize this process, Miguel de Oliver discusses the suburban “metanarrative,” defining metanarrative as a ubiquitous “informal collective belief” that acts as a

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<sup>19</sup> Kalaska, M. (2015) Changes in the distribution of quantitative features of guest houses in the Medina of Marrakesh. *Miscellanea Geographica – Regional Studies on Development*. 19(1). Pp. 6

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. pp. 5.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. pp. 5-6.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. pp. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. pp. 6-7.

legitimizing force but is not rooted in logic.<sup>25</sup> Noting that both supply side explanations, based on potential profitability, and demand side explanations, based on cultural consumption, are incomplete, he explains gentrification, particularly as it has evolved in the United States, through the postmodern fragmentation of the suburban metanarrative, as the middle-class grows disillusioned with and departs from “the suburban standard.”<sup>26</sup> He proceeds to explain that early gentrifiers were drawn by “therapeutic associations with the inner city,” followed by a second wave in the 1970s to late 1980s characterized by laissez-faire private investment, Bohemian middle-class pioneers, agendas of renewal, and sexual liberation.<sup>27</sup> This wave, de Oliver asserts, constitutes the “classical conception of gentrification” that resulted in racial displacement.<sup>28</sup> The third wave in the early 1990s and 2000s, however, was riding on already elevated housing values and a culture of conspicuous consumption, and corporate real estate investors rose to dominance.<sup>29</sup> This “gentrification by capital” that de Oliver discusses ties in a commercial aspect of gentrification in which cultural tourism plays a role, especially as globalization and the mobility of capital allow investment into previously un-gentrified areas.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, following the recession in the 1990s, municipal authorities in the United States encouraged large-scale private investment to help relieve stressed budgets.<sup>31</sup> Thus, gentrification took on a new face at least in the United States, though this process is reflected elsewhere. For example, in the 1990s, the *Plan to Rehabilitate the Medina in Fes* rose to fruition with help from the World Bank. With the goal of profitability and urban renewal, the plan recommended opening up the

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<sup>25</sup> De Oliver, M. (2019). Defending Gentrification as a Valid Collective Conception: Utilizing the Metanarrative of “Suburbia” as a Common Axis for the Diversity of Middle-Class Reurbanization Projects. *Urban Affairs Review*, 55(5). Pp. 1487-1511. Retrieved from journals.sagepub.com/home/uar. Pp. 1489-1490.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. pp. 1493.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. pp. 1494-1495.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. pp. 1495.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. pp. 1497-1499.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. pp. 1497-1500.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. pp. 1501.

medina to investment at the private, national, and international levels.<sup>32</sup> Global gentrification resulting from tourism is a phenomenon distinct from that which has occurred in the United States, but, as de Oliver argues, it is still tied in with the dissipation of the suburban metanarrative, and the commercialization of cultural consumption allowed by the globalization of capital.<sup>33</sup> It is also driven by cheap air fares, the Internet and social media, and the striking success of companies like Airbnb. Though the process of gentrification in Fes and other Moroccan cities began long before the 1990s, foreign ownership of riads and hostel and guesthouse culture in the medinas is still a recent phenomenon. As the presence of these accommodations and the rehabilitation of traditional homes continue to drive up housing prices, are these spaces also at risk for corporate takeover? Despite the large proportion of foreign-owned hostels and guesthouses, these establishments still create local jobs through their rehabilitation and operation, and are therefore often perceived as beneficial for the local economy. However, as the gentrification of the medinas continues, will the money increasingly go to monolithic corporate entities and foreign intermediaries?

The rapid rehabilitation of riads has already left a mark on Morocco's medinas. As one of Mead's interviewees tells her for her New Yorker article on Airbnb in Barcelona, a few tourist accommodations in a residential block changes the whole street.<sup>34</sup> Establishments that bring tourists into residential neighborhoods set standards of high Internet speeds and luxury amenities, as well as a density of food and entertainment.<sup>35</sup> The economic impact of repeated short-term stays favors clothing stores and restaurants, but can be deadly to businesses intended

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<sup>32</sup> Berriane, M. and Janati, M. I. North-South migration to Fes... The first fruits of a resurgent cosmopolitanism?. In *Urban Forum Journal*. Pp, 9.

<sup>33</sup> De Oliver, M. (2019). Defending Gentrification as a Valid Collective Conception: Utilizing the Metanarrative of "Suburbia" as a Common Axis for the Diversity of Middle-Class Reurbanization Projects. *Urban Affairs Review*. 55(5). Pp. 1487-1511. Retrieved from [journals.sagepub.com/home/uar](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/uar). Pp. 1489-1490.

<sup>34</sup> Mead, R. (2019, April 22). The Airbnb Invasion of Barcelona. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/04/29/the-airbnb-invasion-of-barcelona>.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

for permanent residents, such as dry cleaners and tailors.<sup>36</sup> Mead cites the example of a city proposal for a “pedestrianized superblock” in the Sant Antoni neighborhood in Barcelona that was met with apprehension from residents, because the benefit to the community was eclipsed by the accompanying increase in tourist appeal.<sup>37</sup> Referring specifically to Airbnb, Mead explains that home sharing is susceptible to the tragedy of the commons: “An individual apartment dweller might flourish for a while by renting out his spare room on Airbnb, but if his landlord decided that it would be more profitable to turn the entire building into tourist accommodations, he would find himself kicked out when his lease was up.”

In Morocco’s medinas, converting entire buildings has proven profitable indeed. According to Borghi and Minca, some of the negative impacts of the purchase and rehabilitation of riads include the modification of urban cultures, spatial fragmentation and residential segregation, rising housing prices, lack of regulation in renovation, and the sexual behavior of tourists.<sup>38</sup> Gentrification is inherently destructive to local communities, as is discussed in some detail in this paper. However, not all of its impacts are perceived as negative. In fact, 57 percent of residents surveyed for a study cited by Borghi and Minca asserted that the gentrification of the medina was a positive trend.<sup>39</sup> Foreign investment in tourism in the medinas creates jobs, supports local craftsmanship, and has resulted in the rehabilitation of many riads.<sup>40</sup> Most of the criticism of gentrification, rather, comes from national media and middle class Moroccans living outside the medina.<sup>41</sup> As my research pertains specifically to hostels and guesthouses, these forms of accommodation have the potential to support the local economy to a greater extent than

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Borghi, R. and Minca, C. (2009). Morocco: Restaging Colonialism for the masses. In *Cultures of Mass Tourism. Doing the Mediterranean in the Age of Banal Mobilities* (M. Crang et al., ed.). Londre: Ashgate. Pp. 18

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. pp. 19. \*Note: Respondents agreed that gentrification is “a ‘good thing’ for the urban environment as a whole.”

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. pp. 18.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. pp. 19.

hotels, though foreign ownership of converted riads still removes capital from the local market and into the hands of foreign intermediaries.<sup>42</sup> These dynamics are further complicated by the recentness of hostel presence in the medinas, as the magnitude of their impact has yet to be recognized.

*The politics of accommodation in the tourism industry*

In order to analyze hostels in Morocco holistically, I will back up and discuss the concept of accommodation in the tourism industry as a whole. Tourism has a complex and varying economic impact. Economic leakage is a predominant issue for the tourism industry worldwide; often under 20 percent of the total cost of a trip actually remains in the host destination.<sup>43</sup> By importing building materials, supplies, and human resources, hotels and resorts — particularly international corporations — are the primary culprits.<sup>44</sup> Though these establishments might employ residents of the host country, their salaries will be lower than top management staff, many of whom are expatriates.<sup>45</sup> Aside from the salaries for local personnel, the primary benefit for the local economy comes from tourists purchasing souvenirs, while larger expenditures by tourists in hotels and resorts are diverted, profiting foreign air carriers and lodging brands.<sup>46</sup> Tourism can also lead to inflation and increased land values in the host economy, leading to tourist gentrification, as well as over-dependence on this economic sector, which makes communities vulnerable to natural disasters or even seasonal changes in demand.<sup>47</sup> With the expansion of air travel in the mid-1900s and the high-speed Internet, supersized passenger aircrafts, super cruise ships, and high capacity apartment cruises of the modern era, the scale of

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. pp. 18.

<sup>43</sup> Timothy, D. and Teye, V. (2009). *Tourism and the lodging sector* (1st ed.). Burlington, MA: Elsevier. Pp. 51.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. pp. 52-54.

tourism has surged astronomically.<sup>48</sup> The post-World War II phenomenon of global mass tourism has overstated economic benefits due to inflation and leakage, major consequences for the environment and culture, and is exclusive to marginalized groups, and has thus often been labeled a form of neocolonialism.<sup>49</sup> Though it is common for tax revenue from tourism to be reinvested into communities, the “blind promotion” of the industry has adverse consequences that exacerbate economic inequality.<sup>50</sup> Though alternative forms of tourism have emerged since the 1980s, including ecotourism, volunteer tourism, cultural and heritage tourism, geotourism and educational tourism, these too have repercussions and have grown to excess.<sup>51</sup> As Timothy and Teye write: “Unfortunately, so many people are becoming more conscientious in their travel choices that we are now beginning to see the likes of mass ecotourism, mass volunteer tourism, and other forms of mass alternative tourism.”<sup>52</sup>

Tourism has been long been promoted in Morocco as an engine for economic growth, and in 2011, it accounted for 8.9 percent of the country’s GDP and directly contributed to 7.8 percent of total employment.<sup>53</sup> That promotion has been renewed in Vision 2020, which aims for significant increases in tourism receipts and bed capacity.<sup>54</sup> However, Bouzahzah and El Menyari question whether tourism is actually a cause or a consequence of economic growth due to reverse causality. They argue that “mass tourism should not be regarded as an effective engine for economic growth in the long run” in Morocco, due in part to the dependence on international

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. pp. 4.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. pp 55.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. pp. 57.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Bouzahzah, M. and El Menyari, Y. (2013) International tourism and economic growth: the case of Morocco and Tunisia. *The Journal of North African Studies*. 18 (4). Pp. 592-607. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13629387.2013.836321>. Pp. 592.

<sup>54</sup> Vision 2020. *SMIT Morocco: Tourism, Engineering and Investment*. Retrieved from <https://smit.gov.ma/vision-2020-3/>

tour operators.<sup>55</sup> Rather, “the potential of tourism in promoting long-term growth of a country depends on the degree of differentiation of its tourism products and services.”<sup>56</sup> Therefore, Bouzahzah and El Menyari argue that Morocco should promote niche products, reinvest in local development and the improvement of existing infrastructure, and reduce dependence on international tour operators, rather than supporting the construction of the “new superstructure” of hotels and restaurants.<sup>57</sup>

Youth hostels and guesthouses, including the converted riads I am studying, are an example of an alternative to this “superstructure,” and to international tour operators or lodging brands. According to Timothy and Teye, many countries regard backpackers and foreign independent travelers (FITs) as insignificant to their economies due to the inexpensive nature of their style of travel.<sup>58</sup> Yet these travelers still have social and cultural impacts on the host country. Though some countries, such as Australia and New Zealand, are notably backpacker-friendly, Tanzania, for example, denied access to backpackers in the 1970s and early 1980s for these reasons.<sup>59</sup> Though there are downsides to this form of accommodation, converted-riad hostels in Morocco do have the potential to promote sustainable travel. Establishments geared toward budget travelers are arguably more sustainable than other forms of accommodation. Timothy and Teye note that these places are “more likely to be locally owned, employ destination residents, and utilize locally produced goods and services.”<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, a larger percentage of budget travelers’ expenditure directly benefits the host community, and they often spend more time, and therefore more money, in the host country.<sup>61</sup> They are also more likely to

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. pp. 604.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. pp. 603-604.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. pp. 604-605.

<sup>58</sup> Timothy, D. and Teye, V. (2009). *Tourism and the lodging sector* (1st ed.). Burlington, MA: Elsevier. Pp. 215.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. pp. 217.

visit regions in earlier stages of development and endure more hardships than mass tourists.<sup>62</sup>

Hostels in particular attract a relatively young population, and youth tourism plays a meaningful role in promoting intercultural understanding.<sup>63</sup> Youth are also more likely to fall into the category of non-institutionalized tourism, in which tourists tend to accept the “responsibilities” of the tourist and seek greater immersion than those in the institutionalized tourism category.<sup>64</sup>

In a 2012 study of young people aged 18-26 in Córdoba, Spain, Fernández *et al.* found that young people actually have relatively little knowledge of hostels, which they argue limits their ability to travel.<sup>65</sup> Many conceptualize hostels as a place to sleep with many people and poor quality, and will likely opt for other forms of accommodation if financial circumstances allow it.<sup>66</sup> When “appreciation for travel” and “time spent abroad” increase, however, the probability of staying in a hostel increases as well.<sup>67</sup> Of those surveyed in the study, 15.2 percent choose hostels as their form of travel accommodation, after apartments, hotels, and campsites.<sup>68</sup> Despite the lack of knowledge of hostels they encountered in their study, hostels are growing in popularity, and Fernández *et al.* note that this segment of the tourist industry has “evolved significantly” in the past two decades alone.<sup>69</sup> The concept of hostels originated in Germany in the early 1900s, initially only open to youth, and guests were expected to help with some housework to help pay for their stay.<sup>70</sup> Today, hostels are less restrictive and rarely place an age cap on guests.<sup>71</sup> And if modern hostels are relatively new to the world, they are especially new to

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Muñoz Fernández, G. A., Cañizares, S. S., & Infante, S. C. (2016). Youth and tourism perspective. application to hostels. *Regional and Sectoral Economic Studies*, 16(1), pp. 73.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. pp. 72.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. pp. 81.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. pp. 80.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. pp. 74.

<sup>70</sup> Timothy, D. and Teye, V. (2009). *Tourism and the lodging sector* (1st ed.). Burlington, MA: Elsevier. Pp. 219.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. pp. 213.

Morocco. The novelty of their existence and the prominence of foreign ownership of converted riads makes the politics surrounding Morocco's riad-style hostels quite complex, and the benefits to the community created by these establishments likely vary between location and ownership structure. This paper seeks to explore these dynamics further.

## **Methodology**

I conducted my research in four cities: Fes, Tangier, Rabat, and Essaouira. I spent five to six nights in a riad-style hostel in each of these cities. My intention was to compare hostel culture in cities with significant but differing levels of tourist presence in the medinas. I chose a riad-hostel in Fes because it is not only a very 'touristy' city and a destination for expats, but it is known as Morocco's cultural capital, and its medina was founded in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>72</sup> Given the city's history, I expect the acceleration of tourism in Morocco has had a particularly acute impact. I chose a riad-hostel in Tangier due to its proximity to Spain and the city's reputation being exceedingly multilingual, making it accessible to a greater number of foreigners. I had initially intended to conduct research in Casablanca and Asilah, but changed my plans to Rabat and Essaouira after narrowing my research to include riad-style hostels exclusively. The establishments I had selected in Casablanca and Asilah were a guesthouse and a hostel that was not a riad, respectively. I chose Rabat because I am more familiar with the city, and I thought it would be interesting to include a city with very few hostels in my study. Essaouira I chose primarily due to recommendations from people I met during the research period. The hostel I selected here was recommended to me at least five times, is relatively inexpensive, and is owned and run exclusively by Moroccans.

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<sup>72</sup> Berriane, M. and Janati, M. I. North-South migration to Fes... The first fruits of a resurgent cosmopolitanism?. In *Urban Forum Journal*.

Over the course of four weeks, I interviewed two hostel owners, six hostel employees, one guest, one cultural studies professor, and an antique shop owner in Fes. I recognized that my methods had the potential to pose some ethical dilemmas, as I was staying at the hostels at which I conducted these interviews and I did not want any individuals to feel pressured to speak with me out of hospitality. I was very clear about the purpose of my interviews and explained that they were entirely optional. I was able to speak to an owner, employee, or both at every hostel I stayed at, but I was prepared to seek out interviews from nearby hostels or rely on other interviews and participatory observation if need be. My hope was that this methodology would actually prove a more ethical method of arranging interviews, as I would be able to establish a relationship first as a guest. I believe this was the case, and all of the people I ended up interviewing were enthusiastic to share their thoughts with me.

One obstacle I expected to face was hesitancy to share anything but positive experiences, as hosts likely want to portray a welcoming, affable environment. I hoped to mitigate this by ensuring confidentiality and changing names. Another obstacle I anticipated is the brevity of my stays in each hostel. I could have instead planned to stay in one hostel for four weeks or different hostels in one city; however, I hope that the opportunity to interview multiple hostel owners in different environments outweighed the limits my time frame posed for my research. The result of this is that my research is limited to rather popular hostels at each research site, and my discussion of the history of tourism in each city is limited. I hope that my findings are cohesive nonetheless, though I recognize that the opinions of the individuals I interviewed are in no way generalizable to the larger population. In addition to interviews, my research relies on relevant literature, data, and participant observation. Because hostels are very new to Morocco and not widely researched, I also discuss data on riad-style guesthouses in the medinas, which is more

readily available and gives context to the changing culture of the medinas despite not focusing on riad-style hostels specifically. It is not my intention to conflate these two forms of accommodation, but many similarities are present and both contribute to the trend of converting riads into tourist accommodations.

The body of my paper is structured so that the reader can follow my own thought process during the research period. Nearly half of my interview subjects are based in Fes, so I use this city as a reference point. Initially, I focused on the impacts of tourism on cultural representation and gentrification, but I transition into a discussion of the varying approaches of hostels toward receiving Moroccan guests, which I had not anticipated, but is an issue that is specific to hostels. As this discussion is about an intentional business orientation within the theme of my paper, I believe my research question captures this topic, and thus I did not adjust my terminology.

## **Findings**

### ***A note on price inflation and foreign investment***

The Moroccan government advertises on its *Tourism Engineering and Investment* website that the country has a “friendly investment climate” with “no restrictions on access to land ownership for foreign investors,” with the exception of agricultural land.<sup>73</sup> Likewise, there are no restrictions on corporate ownership of land by foreign investors.<sup>74</sup> Investors can hold up to 100 percent of share capital and transfer all profits to their home country.<sup>75</sup> According to a New York Times article by Roxana Popescu on real estate in Morocco, foreigners comprise 70 to 80 percent of Morocco’s luxury real estate buyers.<sup>76</sup> Popescu interviewed the director of a luxury real estate

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<sup>73</sup> Why Morocco. *SMIT Morocco: Tourism, Engineering and Investment*. Retrieved from [smit.gov.ma/why-morocco/](http://smit.gov.ma/why-morocco/).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Popescu, R. (4 Jan. 2018). House Hunting in ... Morocco. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from [www.nytimes.com/2018/01/04/realestate/house-hunting-in-morocco.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/04/realestate/house-hunting-in-morocco.html).

agency in Marrakech, who said that a nice riad in Marrakech or Tangier can cost between USD\$240,000 and USD\$360,000.<sup>77</sup> The prices of luxury properties, defined as 1 million euros or higher in Marrakech and 500,000 euros or higher in Tangier, actually peaked prior to the 2008 global financial crisis and are now 20 to 30 percent lower.<sup>78</sup> However, luxury sales increased again in Marrakech in 2012, and Tangier and Essaouira have also seen increases in demand.<sup>79</sup>

After I left Fes, I interviewed a cultural studies professor based there named Sadik Rddad. He specializes in Berber culture, Sufism, gender and religion, and the dynamics of space, specifically Muslim and modern spaces, and has some insight into the history of riads in Fes. He told me that the medina of Fes contains the largest number of riads at about 12,000, compared to an estimated 4,000 in Marrakech and 2,000 in Essaouira. According to Professor Rddad, you used to be able to rent a room in the Fes medina for about 100 dirhams per month (USD\$10.37). It's affordability was part of what made the city attractive. By 1995, however, a beautiful old house Professor Rddad's family was selling could go for around USD\$13,000. Now, he estimates that house could be worth USD\$70,000 or more.

### ***Fes: riad-style hostel 1***

With its medina classified as a "World Heritage Site" since 1981, Fes is often referred to as Morocco's cultural capital and has attracted not only tourists, but also a number of expats seeking "long-term tourist residency."<sup>80</sup> These 'lifestyle' or 'wellbeing' migrants, mostly from Europe and the United States, have reversed the South to North migration pattern and made Fes their home. Though tourists were present in the Fes medina long before, this 'migration pattern' did not begin in Fes until the late 1990s, as the first tourist settlers opted for Marrakech,

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Berriane, M. and Janati, M. I. North-South migration to Fes... The first fruits of a resurgent cosmopolitanism?. In *Urban Forum Journal*. Pp. 1.

Essaouira, Tangier, Asilah, or Chefchaouen.<sup>81</sup> According to Berriane and Janati, the first traditional house in the Fes medina that was sold to a foreigner was sold in 1997, to an American who bought and restored five houses total.<sup>82</sup> Berriane and Janati assert that most traditional houses in the Fes medina are bought and used as primary or secondary residence, while the second most common use is tourist accommodation.<sup>83</sup> The “guesthouse” is quite new to Morocco, a form of accommodation that only arose with the sale of these traditional homes to foreigners in the late 1990s. According to the owners of the hostel I stayed in in Fes, the “hostel” is a new form of accommodation in Morocco as well.

This process is not solely the result of a few foreign pioneers capitalizing on an investment opportunity in the heritage of the Fes medina. With help from the World Bank, the *Plan to Rehabilitate the Medina in Fes* came to fruition in the 1990s, encouraging the opening up of the medina to private, national, and international investment.<sup>84</sup> By May 2010, there were 54 licensed and classified guesthouses in Fes, around 20 more licensed but unclassified guesthouses, and an estimated 150 to 200 undeclared guesthouses.<sup>85</sup> Professor Rddad reiterated what I found in my literature review, that riads were converted in the 1990s at the urging of the government for the purposes of cultural revival and job creation. When Morocco’s economic and political centre moved toward the coast, many Fassis (people from Fes) moved out, while a large rural population moved in during the 1970s and 1980s due to a drought. Many middle class Moroccans also moved out of the medina for better education and access to transportation, and the city’s inhabitants could no longer afford to keep it alive. In the early 90s, prices rose, due in part to competition from China and Turkey, and the medina of Fes was in decline. Professor

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid. pp. 3.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. pp. 3-4.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. pp. 8-9.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. pp. 9.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

Rddad thinks the converted riads are “working wonderfully,” as it is important that the people of Fes benefit directly from tourism, and tourists are able to experience Fes with greater understanding than they could acquire in uniform hotels. In fact, when the government and local authorities began encouraging families to convert riads, hotel owners were the ones to complain, according to Professor Rddad.

As discussed in the literature review, hostels and guesthouses do attract a very specific type of population. Out of six people I asked about why they chose to stay in a hostel in Fes, all answered with some variation of “for the community feel” or “to meet people” as their number one reason. Other reasons included the low cost, the ease of booking tours, safety, location in the medina, convenience for solo travelers, and the ability to find out what to do from other guests. I interviewed an Australian guest, whom I will call Amelia, in depth. Currently age 28, she is five months into her fourth solo trip. She estimates that she has stayed in at least 60 hostels during this trip and over 200 hostels total in her lifetime. Though she loves meeting people and getting travel recommendations in hostels, she finds that she makes more genuine connections through couch surfing. Interactions with guests in hostels tend to be very repetitive, she explained, and guests are usually other foreign travelers as opposed to locals. Though her primary reason for coming to Morocco is the culture, she told me that she doesn’t look for “authenticity” in hostels, which she says are more of a “haven” away from the real world:

“Yes, this [hostel] is quite authentic in the way that it’s designed, but the environment inside here isn’t totally Moroccan. Listen to the music we have on at the moment, and the people around us. There [are] a couple of Moroccan workers, but to get the real authentic experience, you need to completely immerse yourself. And that’s by couch surfing, or sitting on a bus and talking to people and not being afraid to have a conversation.”

Amelia told me that she thinks a lot about why people travel. She has had conversations in hostels in which people push back on her emphasis on immersion because they are “just tourists,” and are not interested in learning the language, having conversations with locals, or living in the way that actual residents of the host country live. In her view, hostels are not spaces for immersion, as they typically offer activities only at the most touristy sites. Though she has stayed at several hostels in Morocco that offer language exchanges, she would love to see hostels further diversify their repertoire. Amelia also told me that she thinks a lot about where she puts her money as a tourist. She used to work as a travel agent, and she saw a lot of people who were oblivious to their impact on the host country and the environment.

“My personal choice is to stay in hostels and couch surf, and eat with the locals and catch local transport. So, I mean, I’m the sort of person who will go to a country like this quite well aware that I’m wealthy compared to the majority of these people, but I would like to put my wealth to good use, whether that’s, you know, buying off the locals for fruits and vegetables, tea, or eating at a restaurant that’s not a chain hotel.”

The conscientiousness and cultural awareness Amelia displays is not representative, of course, of the behavior of all hostel guests. A full-time hostel employee I interviewed, whom I will call Youssef, told me about various stereotypes he has encountered. He explained that everyone has misperceptions, but some people are always wrong, and those people expect the worst and do not get much out of their experience in Morocco. Laughing, he gave an example of a woman who thought she couldn’t respond to people in the street when they talk to her because of her gender. I asked Youssef how he responds to misperceptions and stereotypes. He says he just ignores them. He said that people assume that because he is from the desert, he lived in a tent with goats. Someone even told him that they had been in Morocco for an entire month, and had never seen any Moroccan women in the street. I also interviewed the hostel’s owner, whom I will call Aamir. Aamir said he also encounters a lot of stereotypes, but that these are just a result

of how people grew up, and he doesn't let it affect him when people are "aggressive against the culture of Morocco." He said he responds by just being honest, but at the end of the day, his job is to do whatever it takes to make his guests happy.

Though both Youssef and Aamir described their reaction to stereotypes as involving some form of covert resistance, both articulated a clear refusal to present guests with a 'culturally immersive' space. Not only did they reflect Amelia's point that guests do not seek immersion in hostels, but they think that guests would be afraid if presented with 100 percent of their culture. Aamir said he tries to show guests 40 to 50 percent of the culture. Youssef consciously presents a version of his culture that he believes will be best received:

"I like to represent it as open, and in a modern feeling, so people feel like they're closer to Moroccan culture than they're apart, you know, which makes them feel more at home. Like the Italian guy said, you know, when he learned about weed, he thought: 'It is like Europe.' And he liked it and he wants to stay here. So I like to represent it as more of what we have in common than what separates us."

Youssef and Aamir both reflect Alexis Bunten's "paradox of representation." However, they both insisted that the positive experiences outnumber the negative ones. Young people, who constitute the vast majority of the hostel's guests, like to socialize and go to bars and meet locals. Both told me that guests are friendly try to be very respectful of the surrounding community. And, according to Youssef, if they stay long enough, they tend to make friends with the city's residents. In my own interactions with guests, I had several conversations, including outside the context of this paper, in which other travelers displayed nuanced reflection about their impact as a tourist, especially concerning their efforts to support local businesses and communities over chain restaurants and multinational corporations.

Yet even conscientious tourism has adverse impacts. According to Berriane and Janati, many Fassis are actually moving back to Fes, a phenomenon that is not occurring, for example,

in Marrakech.<sup>86</sup> Berriane and Janati argue that foreigners do not have a high social profile, as running their business generally keeps them occupied, and “cultural mixing” is limited.<sup>87</sup> Thus, they posit, “recent signs revealing a relatively foreign appropriation of the public spaces have not been accompanied by any cultural or ethnic reshaping.”<sup>88</sup> Berriane and Janati are specifically discussing the phenomenon of tourist residency in Fes, and perhaps this argument holds weight. Despite the gentrifying effects of this reverse migration trend, it is quite possible that the presence of foreign expatriates in Fes has not extensively diluted or reshaped the culture. However, the presence of tourists in rehabilitated riads, often owned by foreign expatriates, might have adverse impacts that are specific to these spaces, and are not inherent to the tourist gentrification process that preceded guesthouses and hostels with the presence of hotels.

I met an antique shop owner in the Fes medina, whom I shall call Mehdi, who had befriended a couple of my friends when they studied Arabic in Fes a year ago. I had not intended to interview him, but when I told him what I was studying, he was quite enthusiastic to share his thoughts. He told me that the mass tourism in the medina, and the accompanying rise in housing prices and cost of living, began back in the 1970s and 1980s, before the recent trend of riad rehabilitation began. In his perception, however, many people in the medina view tourism in a positive light, as it provides jobs for Fassi people and stimulates the economy. There is a lot of unemployment in Fes, Mehdi explained, especially among youth, so people in the medina welcome the influx of foreign money. This view is consistent with Borghi’s and Minca’s analysis, which notes that much of the criticism of tourist gentrification comes from outside the medina, from national media or middle class Moroccans. People in the medina are also often supportive of riad rehabilitation for similar reasons; the rehabilitation itself supports laborers

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid. pp. 9.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. pp. 10-11.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. pp. 11.

with “hand-skills,” such as wood or *zelij* (tilework) artisans, and the riad’s repurposed use as a tourist accommodation creates jobs for Moroccans as well. According to Mehdi, however, converted riads pose specific problems for Fassis that had not been brought to my attention previously. Mehdi explained to me that privacy is paramount in Moroccan culture, and in a traditional Moroccan home, privacy begins at the door and at the terrace. Mehdi took me to meet his wife and one of his daughters in his home in the medina, and he showed me how when you open the door, you see only a blank wall, and you have to turn through a hallway to see into the rooms of the dwelling. In a similar way, the terrace is not intended to allow strangers to see into the home. The terrace is a typically female space, used for washing and drying clothes. Converted riads stand among houses inhabited by Moroccan families, and when tourists go up onto the terraces and look over into the surrounding homes, often acting in a conspicuous manner, it is a huge violation of these traditional norms of privacy. Furthermore, tourists produce massive amounts of trash. Moroccan families generally produce just a small bag of trash, which they put out on the street until it is collected. The trash from converted riads is also put out on the streets, according to Mehdi, but in much larger quantities, and the surrounding residents have to see and smell it when they pass by.

I spoke with Professor Rddad about the presence of tourists on the terraces, and he reiterated that this “roof culture” is a conservative and female dynamic of space, in which women are not supposed to be seen. As Professor Rddad put it: “It’s going out without going out.” These women do not expect to see men or have their privacy violated by tourists, and can no longer use the roof as they have in the past. As Fes is the “spiritual capital,” this issue is particularly acute here, as well as in places such as Ouazzane, which is also considered a sacred city. Though he said that Fes is still “authentic” in many ways, “foreign components have

disfigured the cultural landscape of the medina.” And the impact of tourists in conservative spaces is more than just a side effect; Professor Rddad told me that the government constantly tries to use tourism as a vehicle for modernization and to open up society.

In hindsight, these seem like rather obvious obtrusions by tourists in guesthouses and hostels. Yet I was quite surprised that rooftop behavior is what Mehdi decided to tell me about, rather than the effects of tourist gentrification or the presence of tourists on the streets. Having lived in Fes all his life, Mehdi perceives other problems with the conversion of riads. He believes that the people living in a city give life to the city, just as the people living in buildings give life to the buildings. Though he prefers the term ‘rehabilitate’ to ‘renovate,’ he acknowledges that individuals with varying or foreign tastes do indeed make renovations in the colors, forms, and shapes of riads, and the authenticity disappears. However, he believes that his feelings are different from those around him, that he feels this way because he has a “critical mind” that allows him to see the two faces of tourism: the economic benefits as well as the cultural degradation. Other residents of the medina, he believes, take issue with violations of privacy or the increase in trash, but are still generally supportive of the expansion of tourism. I did not interview enough members of the community to be able to comment on how other residents feel, but Mehdi’s perceptions are fascinating, and, at the very least, reflect some of the nuance at play here. Furthermore, they made me think more about the ways in which converted riads can have specific and distinct consequences, just as they can have specific and distinct benefits for the economy by providing an alternative to multi-national hotels and international tour operators.

Each person, whether tourist, employee or owner, or a member of the community, will interact with the medina’s hostels and guesthouses differently. A discussion of tourist, host, and community dynamics, however, would be incomplete without a discussion of foreign ownership

and exclusion. Aamir, the owner of the riad-style hostel in Fes, is Moroccan, as are the other six members of his staff. According to Aamir, however, many converted riads in Fes are owned by foreigners. It's a good business for foreigners, Aamir explained, and he also believes that tourists are more comfortable staying in a place that is run by someone "who can understand their culture, compared to staying in a place that is run by a Moroccan or by a local. That can be a little uncomfortable for them—the way that they behave or the way that they act."

Aamir started out in this industry as a couch surfing host, and he opened this hostel in Fes 14 years ago. I expected him to be a little more critical of the overwhelming presence of foreigners in this burgeoning business. As I was a guest in his hostel myself, I acknowledge that his answers may have been swayed by his efforts to be a welcoming host. Still, the answers he gave me were extremely critical of Moroccans. He understands why foreigners come in with preconceived stereotypes about Morocco, he explained. He said that these misperceptions are merely a result of education, social media, or the way they have been brought up, and are not the fault of the tourists. When it comes to Moroccans, however, he was critical of any refusal to accommodate:

"The people who live in Morocco need to be more open minded. If you watch TV, then try to pay attention watch how people live there, like get an idea so you can connect to those people... Or like a female, she's wearing this or wearing this or whatever. In my eyes, they are just people. They should see the same thing. If they come here and tourists, they try to respect women who is covered or wearing hijab... I think even Moroccan people should do the same thing to them. They should provide them this respect; they should provide them their space. Because those people they came here to see your country, to connect to you guys, to see Moroccan people, and helping the economy. So in my opinion, you should give them what they need... because they are helping your country."

When I asked him about how he thinks the surrounding community perceives the tourists who stay in his hostel, he said some are accepting and some are not. Those that are not, however, he said are just jealous, because as long as the tourists are respectful, they are not doing anything

wrong. Youssef, the full-time employee whom I interviewed, was not so critical of Moroccan society's treatment of tourists. He was, however, quite critical of Moroccans' competency to run a business. In his view, foreigners usually do a better job at running hostels and guesthouses. They follow the law and, usually, run their business in a "correct" way. Even though Youssef is employed by a Moroccan, he believes the hostel he works in is an exception to the norm because it is "family run," and he told me he thinks most Moroccans would prefer to work for a foreigner.

"If a Moroccan owns a business, they are going to do everything wrong. They are going to higher the prices, they are going to lower the quality, they are not going to provide you the best service... Moroccans, they will tend to, you know, avoid taxes, they will try to not pay the staff on the correct dates..."

Though he would prefer for locals to own these riads, Youssef said it does not really matter who owns the building in terms of the economic benefits for the community; the owner will still hire Moroccan staff. Youssef's views, or Aamir's for that matter, are obviously not representative of the views of all Moroccans employed in the hostel industry. There could very well be a lot of hostility toward foreign riad owners that was not communicated to me during my stay in Fes. However, the lack of confidence in Moroccan business owners was paralleled by another narrative that I found perplexing coming from employees of an entirely Moroccan business: a lack of confidence in Moroccan guests. Youssef told me that Moroccans "almost never" stay in hostels when they travel. Part of this is for legal reasons; Youssef has to check the marriage certificate of a Moroccan couple before he can let them stay in the same room. When I asked about mixed dormitories, however, Youssef said that it's more of a "business orientation" not to allow Moroccans stay there, as Moroccans can legally sleep in dormitories.

"When [Moroccans stay in hostels], it's not the same. For example, especially in mixed dorms... if a girl she has a shower and she comes out, a Moroccan person staying in the same dorm will not look at her the same way, you know? There is also the risk of stealing. Moroccan people, you can't just— they are not ready yet to travel in hostels and live, you know, live with other people and respect their

privacy, and everybody respect each other. It's just the way Moroccans grow up. They are not ready yet for hostels, we think.”

If a Moroccan does make a reservation and shows up, Youssef told me that they read the situation and will let people stay if they “seem nice,” just not in any of the dorms. However, he said that “hustlers” from the street sometimes try to book a night at the hostel to “hustle” the other tourists. Sometimes, he continued, these kids will go on Hostelworld and write bad reviews about the hostel for not allowing Moroccan guests. Youssef laughed about this and said it will bring more guests to the hostel, insinuating that tourists will feel more comfortable staying in a place that does not allow Moroccans.

On my last morning at the hostel in Fes, I did briefly meet a group of six Moroccan female software engineers who had spent the night in a private room among themselves. I did not get to speak to them for long, but they are an example of an exception to this generalization that Youssef presented to me that Moroccans do not stay in hostels. This conversation led me to wonder if hostels are considered open spaces for Moroccan travelers, and if this dynamic might vary between Moroccan-owned and foreign-owned hostels. Even where the law applies, Youssef did tell me that many hostels, especially in Marrakech, disregard the prohibition of unmarried Moroccan couples sharing a room, though I have no evidence to support this impression.

I also spoke to Professor Rddad about Moroccans and hostel culture. He believes that when Moroccans travel abroad, they likely do stay in hostels, but not in Morocco. Not only are hostels new to Morocco, but the idea of internal tourism is new. Traditionally, Moroccans would travel to stay with family, and now they either opt for a hostel or family members. “Hostels are not part of our culture,” Professor Rddad explained. “People do not think of hostels when they travel. For me, it's more cultural than anything else.” People do not need to consider hostels, as there are very cheap hotels and hotels are much more visible and easy to find. Following these

conversations, I decided to incorporate this topic into my future interviews to see how different hostels might vary in their willingness to welcome Moroccan guests in their dorms or in private rooms, and whether inclusion of the host country's residents is something that the hostel owners have consciously considered.

***Tangier: riad-style hostel 2***

Located at the juncture of the Atlantic and the Mediterranean on the Strait of Gibraltar, Tangier is a key port city with extensive foreign influence.<sup>89</sup> From the establishment of the French protectorate in 1912 up until Morocco's independence in 1956, Tangier was subjected to multiple periods of collective administration by several European powers.<sup>90</sup> A large number of Westerners settled there during this period, and the city continued to receive European and American artists and writers in the 1950s and 1960s as a hub for art and politics.<sup>91</sup> A mere 20 miles from Europe, Tangier is still a rather touristy city with a plurality of languages spoken on its streets. I stayed in a hostel in the city's old medina that was owned remotely by a French woman and run by her son in her absence. In addition to these two family owners and occasional temporary employees through Workaway, the hostel has five permanent staff, all Moroccan: three cleaning ladies, a manager, and a man working evening to morning. I intended to interview the French son; however, he rescheduled with me several times and I was ultimately unable to interview him. He redirected me to the man who works in the evenings and nights, whom I shall call Mohamed, and this was the only interview I was able to get with a member of the staff.

Mohamed has been working at the hostel for a year, though he also worked in two riad-style guesthouses, both in Tangier, for a total of three years prior to working at this hostel. The

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<sup>89</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. (13 April 2016). Tangier. *Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.*, Retrieved from [www.britannica.com/place/Tangier-Morocco](http://www.britannica.com/place/Tangier-Morocco).

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

hostel has a 36 person capacity and receives guests from every corner of the world, according to Mohamed, most between 20 and 30 years old. Moroccan people occasionally stay here as well. Mohamed told me that there are a number of hostels that don't like hosting Moroccan guests, but that this hostel is welcoming to everyone, including Moroccans, Algerians, and Tunisians. The hostel still abides by the law when it comes to prohibiting unmarried Moroccan couples from staying in private rooms, so if one party of a couple has a Moroccan passport, the couple will need a marriage license. Moroccan travelers, singles or couples, are allowed to stay in the dorms.

I asked Mohamed how he feels about the owners of the hostel being French as opposed to Moroccan. He told me that he has worked for Moroccan people before, but that he prefers to work with French people. I asked him why, and he said:

“Because the people from France, they [know] the law. They know like— okay, if there's like a holiday, they can pay me extra money for my day for holiday. I have been working with Moroccans, and they like [don't] pay me for that day, or, like, you know. That's why I prefer to work with European people than Moroccan. It's not all, but yeah, most Moroccan people I worked with [are] like this.”

He also told me that French people will also ensure that their employees have all the necessary paperwork filed, whereas people might work for a Moroccan for a year or two with no paperwork. Mohamed did not seem to mind the presence of foreign ownership of riads in Tangier. Beyond the benefits he perceives regarding the terms of his own employment, he sees foreign ownership as necessary for the advancement of the tourism industry. Though there are a number of foreign owners, however, he said a lot of riad-style hostels are owned by Moroccans, but not “Moroccan Moroccans.” Maybe a Moroccan will be living somewhere in Europe and come open a hostel in Morocco, but it is hard to produce enough startup capital at home to be able invest in a riad-style hostel unless the riad has been inherited through generations.

“If someone is living here, he can't own his hostel, like it's not easy... If he's working with the government or something like this, he can make that money to

open [a] hostel. But if you're working [normally], you will never open a hostel in Morocco all your life. You will never. That's why most people, even Moroccan people, live in Europe and they make money there and they come open the hostel."

Despite this trend of converting riads into tourist accommodations, however, Mohamed does not think Tangier has changed too much. He was born in Tangier, and he has always thought of it as a touristy city. Even as the city grows, tourists still like to stay in the old medina, but so many houses in the medina are already foreign owned. One of the benefits, he added, is security. The government is very protective of tourists, so they put a lot of cameras up and there are cops everywhere. Because the city is so international, Mohamed told me that the riad-hostel blends well with the community and that most people in the medina are very open. Guest behavior on the terraces has never been a problem, as far as he is aware, even if they play music or have little parties. Even inside the hostels, Mohamed said any hostel in Tangier will "feel normal," as opposed to a space with "so much culture and religion." He told me that a hostel experience would likely be different in the desert or the mountains, where the population is more conservative or at least, to paraphrase, less pluralistic.

As with all my interviews, it is impossible to generalize about the sentiments of a population based on one or two people's perspectives, though Mohamed's perceptions do reflect the legacy of a long presence of foreigners in the city. Just because this hostel is open to Moroccan guests does not mean that this applies broadly to hostels in Tangier. Despite the apparently open and welcoming policies of the hostel, I should note that in my experience thus far, English is the primary language spoken in these spaces, making the social aspect of hostels appealing primarily to English speakers. Unfortunately, it is not within the scope of my study to interview Moroccan youth travelers to see if they feel welcome in hostels in general, or if there is any movement toward this style of accommodation for domestic travelers among the population.

***Rabat: riad-style hostel 3***

Morocco's seaside capital of Rabat is not such a touristy city. Though there are a number of riad-style guesthouses, only two genuine hostels are listed on Hostelworld in the old medina. The hostel I stayed in is not huge, with a capacity of 26 people and a staff comprised of the Moroccan owner, a Moroccan surf instructor/employee, and two temporary employees from Canada and Italy, respectively. Most guests come specifically to surf, so they occasionally employ other surf instructors if need be, but the staff is intentionally minimal. I interviewed three of the four in a focus group style discussion: the owner and the two temporary employees, both of whom had worked in other hostels previously and do this kind of work to support their travel.

This hostel had a rather unique beginning compared to the others I stayed in; the owner, a former professional surfer, used his prize money from competitions to buy and rehabilitate this riad as a surfing association primarily for Moroccan youth, to give back to the community. Surfing is not a cheap sport, and the government does not provide assistance to sports or activity associations such as this one, so the owner told me that half of the money earned in the hostel goes back into the association to fund training for the kids. The hostel has now been running for nine years, and the owner wants to keep it small so that it is easy to maintain and has a tight-knit community. Because the owner works primarily with Moroccan youth, this community is very welcome to Moroccans, and some of the kids who surf with the association will also stay in the hostel. The Canadian employee noted that many of the kids who stay are half Moroccan, or are often visiting from Spain and surfing with the association. Nearly all of the youth that the owner trains are Moroccan. The owner did note that most Moroccans won't stay in hostels, and if they do, they will stay in a private room. He said that Moroccans don't like sharing rooms and prefer "luxury," but the Italian employee noted that because this hostel is a surfing association and it's a

bit more expensive than other hostels, travelers can get a private room somewhere for the same price as a bed in the dormitory room. Compounded with the nature of hostels being a relatively new concept in Morocco, it makes sense that very few Moroccans choose to stay at this particular hostel aside from its surfing students. Anyone who does choose to stay, however, is more than welcome within the law. The owner explained: “You can’t be, like, [egotistic]. I did travel around the world, and everyone accepts me, so why [can’t I] accept people?” Just because Moroccans don’t come to this hostel, however, does not mean that that is the case for all hostels. The Italian woman told me that she had worked in a hostel before that did attract a Moroccan clientele, and she experienced on several occasions individuals trying to find loopholes to stay in private rooms without a marriage certificate.

The owner of this hostel actually grew up in the Rabat medina until the age of 14, when he signed a contract for surfing and moved to France. One of the employees said that it is sad that more hostels are not run by Moroccans, though she acknowledged that it helps in the tourism industry to have spent some time overseas. She worked for another Moroccan hostel owner before, and said that many Moroccans will hire foreign employees to help manage their hostel. Her perspective is likely skewed, however, as she has been working in hostels that intentionally hire foreigners. The organizational structure, of course, varies hostel to hostel, but the owner of this hostel told me that there are not too many foreign-owned riads in Rabat. According to him, the community pushed back on selling houses to foreigners after the initial buyers came in, as they feared that too many foreigners would come into the community and push Moroccans out. There is no legal prohibition to selling houses to foreigners, and I have no evidence to support this community initiative or give any impression of its scope. The market incentives to sell are still strong, but it is true that Rabat has fewer hostels than any other city I am researching. There

are still quite a few guesthouses, however, and the owner told me that the medina has changed a lot in the past 20 years, not just from the presence of tourism, but also from a constant onslaught of construction work in the medina.

A last note on this hostel I would like to include is the conscious effort on the part of the owner to minimize the disruptive elements of the establishment. For example, there are signs inside reminding guests to dress appropriately in the medina, and when the surfing students are around, there is a strict no alcohol and no smoking policy. The terrace is enclosed with high walls, so guests can sit in the sun but cannot look out onto the terraces of the surrounding homes. One of the employees told me that guests are nearly always very respectful, she thinks because Rabat is less touristy, so tourists who decide to come here usually want to “discover the country and the culture” a little more than mass tourists.

#### ***Essaouira: riad-style hostel 4***

An already touristy port city almost directly west of Marrakech, Essaouira’s beaches and art scene are attracting an increasing number of visitors.<sup>92</sup> Like Fes, its medina has also been classified as a UNESCO World Heritage site since 2001, and it is known for its converted-riad tourist accommodations.<sup>93</sup> The hostel I stayed in here is larger than any of the others I have discussed thus far in my paper, with a capacity of around 100 in the warmer months when guests can sleep on the roof. It is also on the cheaper side of the spectrum, with its cheapest dormitory bed priced at just under 54 dirhams (USD\$5.61) per night plus tax. The hostel has 10 permanent employees, all Moroccan, plus a temporary employee from Turkey. It is owned by a Moroccan man who owns several riads and a restaurant in both Essaouira and Marrakech. I interviewed a

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<sup>92</sup> Hikal, Mohamed. (3 Jan. 2019). Tourism in Essaouira Grows, Hotels Booked Out for New Year's. *Morocco World News*, retrieved from [www.morocoworldnews.com/2019/01/262330/tourism-essaouira-morocco/](http://www.morocoworldnews.com/2019/01/262330/tourism-essaouira-morocco/).

<sup>93</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. Essaouira. *Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.*, retrieved from [www.britannica.com/place/Essaouira](http://www.britannica.com/place/Essaouira).

man, whom I will call Omar, who came to Essaouira to play music in the street about five months ago, was offered a job at the hostel because he was sleeping there, and has been working as a receptionist and musician there ever since.

Omar told me that Moroccan guests do stay in this hostel on a regular basis. He did say that many Moroccan people aren't too familiar with the concept of hostels, and often come to the building thinking it is the same as a hotel where they can take a private room. Moroccans do stay in the dorms as well, however, and especially Moroccans who have traveled or lived in other countries will know what they are doing and book a dormitory bed ahead of time. Sometimes, Moroccans who are not staying in the hostel will also come for the nightly family-style dinners that the hostel hosts on its ground floor, though not very frequently. The dinner costs 80 dirhams (USD\$8.32) per person, which is notably more expensive than a meal on the street, but the chance to mingle and listen to traditional live music attracts both hostel guests and the general public, though mostly other tourists. Omar estimated that maybe three or so local Moroccans will come to a dinner in the course of a week. Another employee I spoke to was quite upset about some other hostels' treatment of Moroccan guests. He said that he visited Fes and was turned away from a dormitory room because he is Moroccan, even though he had made a reservation and works in a hostel himself. I do not know what proportion of hostels are open versus not open to receiving Moroccan guests in their dormitories, but I have now been told in several interviews that some hostels in Morocco are exclusive spaces.

Though this hostel is clearly very open to receiving Moroccan guests, I will note that the environment certainly caters to foreigners seeking a 'cultural tourism' experience, perhaps to a greater extent than other hostels I have stayed in. The classic Moroccan dishes served at the dinners and the traditional music played each evening are examples. Omar also told me that the

intentionally “traditional design” of the hostel is very important, and although many hostels offer similar tours and excursions to this hostel, guests here are also encouraged when they check-in to try going to the hammam, or bathhouse, nearby. The philosophy of the hostel — and of the nightly dinners — is to encourage people to meet other people and “share good vibes,” Omar told me. This includes Moroccans, and sometimes the employees here too will go to bars with guests, show them around the city, and even spend time teaching guests some words in Darija, or Moroccan Arabic.

I also spoke to Omar about how he feels about foreign ownership of hostels in Essaouira. He told me that many are owned by foreigners, but it does not make a difference to him who owns the building. It takes a lot of money, he explained, but he also thinks that because hostels are not really a part of Morocco’s culture, only people who have traveled really know how to go about starting their own hostel. As for the community’s perception of hostels, Omar thinks that most people appreciate an influx of tourists because of the economic benefits. The hostel has not had any problems with rooftop behavior, as far as he is aware, although he does not know if that is a problem elsewhere. Omar said that norms of privacy I discussed earlier in my paper exist everywhere in Morocco, but that there is a difference between looking out at the view from the terrace and intentionally looking into homes. He also explained that because Essaouira is very touristy and open-minded, it is normal to see people on the terraces. These are, of course, one person’s opinions and are not to be generalized. This hostel is easily one of the tallest buildings in the Essaouira medina, and I do not know how the surrounding community feels about the constant presence of tourists on the terraces and balconies. I will note that the hostel has a strict no alcohol policy — the strictest out of the hostels I have stayed in for the purposes of this paper — but I do not know if this impacts how its guests interact with the community.

### **Conclusions, limitations, and recommendations of further study**

Through a discussion of the various opinions of individuals connected to the hostel industry, my intention was to discuss the impact of hostels on the surrounding communities, weighing the potential benefits against the consequences of tourist intrusion. My initial focus was on the impact of tourist intrusion on cultural reshaping and global gentrification. However, I found that the answers I received to my questions about cultural representation were rather brief and dismissive, consisting of an acknowledgement of the presence of stereotypes and misconceptions among tourists, an insistence that most are very respectful, and a reminder that to be friendly is part of the job, even if it can be difficult at times. The paradox of representation is present in every part of the cultural tourism industry, riad-style hostels included, but through the course of my study I chose to shift the emphasis of my discussion to the topic of exclusion rather than intrusion. Among the dynamics of cultural reshaping and global gentrification is this parallel narrative in which a new form of travel accommodation that is unfamiliar to Morocco's culture has developed in the country's medinas in the past couple of decades alone. The perceptions of my interviewees indicate that hostel culture seems to be rather uncharted territory for many Moroccans, though in some cases, the relative scarcity of Moroccan guests in riad-style hostels is a result of overt exclusion rather than unfamiliarity.

I also found less hostility to foreign hostel owners than I initially expected. Though each hostel has a different organizational structure, each hostel I studied had a predominantly Moroccan staff. Only five of my 11 interviewees offered any criticism of foreign ownership, and only one of these was a hostel owner or employee. My interviewees were largely indifferent or even supportive of foreign ownership, and all that I discussed the topic with viewed it as necessary due to high startup costs. The perceived benefits to the communities of converted-riads

were a significant point in my interviews, despite the inherently destructive nature of global gentrification. Though my study is far from comprehensive, I can conclude that not all hostels are created equal in terms of their impact. Much of the social impact of a hostel depends on its interactions with the community and thus its approach to receiving the local population, regardless of the lack of popularity of hostels among domestic tourists. Hostels do have the potential to be a sustainable form of tourism compared to multinational hotel corporations, especially if the adverse impacts of tourist intrusion are intentionally minimized.

Though my research generated some thought-provoking findings, the perceptions I encountered are not necessarily widely applicable to the entirety of Morocco, or even the cities in which I conducted my research due to my small sample size. Furthermore, my research was limited to Morocco's coastal regions and Fes, and was conducted in cities with a notable presence of tourists. If I had the resources to expand my study to Morocco's desert or southern regions, it is possible that I would have found a more conservative culture where hostel presence might be received differently. I would recommend a more comprehensive regional analysis of hostel culture in Morocco for further study, as well as in depth interviews of community members, as my primary interviewees were hostel owners and employees. I would also recommend a study of youth travel practices in Morocco, as it is possible that the tradition of domestic travel in Morocco could change — or is changing — to embody hostel culture.

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## Appendix

### *Question bank referenced during interviews with hostel owners and employees*

#### *Basic questions:*

- How long have you worked at this hostel?
- How many people are employed here?
- What is the guest capacity?
- What are the demographics of the guests who stay here?
  - How many Moroccans? Other nationalities?
  - What languages do guests speak?
  - What age range do guests most often fall into?

#### *Interactions with tourists:*

- What kind of experience do you think guests are expecting when they come to stay here?
- What type of environment are you seeking to offer your guests?
- How would you describe your typical interactions with guests?
- How do you represent yourself and your culture to tourists?
  - Do you feel that this representation is authentic, or is it catered to a particular image preconceived by the tourists that come here? A combination of both?
  - Do you find yourself confronting stereotypes that tourists might have about Morocco and its culture?
- Have you had any notable interactions that stand out in your memory, either negative or positive?

#### *Perceptions from community:*

- To your knowledge, how do guests interact with the surrounding community? Neighbors? Shop owners?
- How does the surrounding community perceive the tourists that stay here? How is their presence received?
- Does the presence of tourists alter the demographic and/or cultural makeup of the community here? How so? To what extent?
- What is the financial impact of the tourists who come to this community?
  - Do you think tourism is beneficial overall for Morocco? Are there downsides?
  - Are some tourists have a more negative or positive impact than others?
- In your perception, do the Moroccans who live here prefer tourists to stay in hotels outside the medinas, or hostel accommodations such as this one?
- Is there anything else related to these topics that you think I should know, or that you would like to share?

#### *Incorporated later:*

- How do you feel about the owner of this riad being French/foreign as opposed to Moroccan, or vice versa? About foreign ownership in general?
- Do many Moroccan guests stay here?
- Is this considered a welcoming space for Moroccans? In shared dorms and private rooms (within the law)?